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INFO ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

CIS COLLECTIVE

NATO EU COLLECTIVE

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA

RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 001437

SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY

AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/08/10

TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL ELAB UZ

SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: Human Rights Update

REF: REF A: 09 TASHKENT 915; REF B: 09 TASHKENT 1025

REF C: 08 TASHKENT 819; REF D: 09 TASHKENT 242

CLASSIFIED BY: Holly Lindquist Thomas, P/E Officer, Department of State, Pol-Econ Office; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Although Post was happy to report the continuation of a prison monitoring program by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the human rights climate in Uzbekistan remains difficult, at best. The recent sentencing of journalist Dilmurod Sayyidov to twelve years in prison is illustrative of the consequences that journalists and human rights activists face for speaking out about injustices. Post is hopeful that the government will announce a broad amnesty program around September 1. In the mean time, post will continue to follow the cases below, and address them with Uzbek officials whenever appropriate to do so. End summary.

Amnesty Coming?

¶1. (SBU) Rumors are that the GOU intends to announce a large amnesty corresponding to this year's Independence Day on September 1. Such amnesties are typically announced around the holiday, but because Uzbekistan is celebrating Tashkent's 2200th anniversary this year, human rights activists are hoping to see more names on the list this year than in the past.

Sayyidov Case

¶2. (C) Dilmurod Sayyidov (aka Sayyid or Saidov) (See Ref A) : Journalist Dimurod Saidov was sentenced to 12 years in prison last week on what are widely believed to be trumped up extortion charges. Sayyidov's attorney, Ruhiddin Komilov, told poloff that the witness whose complaint was the basis for the investigation later recanted her testimony, but the Court did not take that into account at the trial. Sayyidov's case is complicated by the fact

that that he already has tuberculosis and is not in good health. He has received no treatment since being taken into custody, and it would be unusual for him to receive treatment in a prison facility. Many believe he will not survive the lengthy sentence.

¶3. (SBU) Human Rights Watch and the OSCE have issued statements decrying the sentence and pointing out irregularities in the trial. Post has not released a public statement on the case, but we intend to raise the case through private channels. Sayyidov's attorney believes it is unlikely that he will be amnestied this fall.

¶4. (SBU) It's worth noting that while the OSCE statement claims that Saidov's attorney was not allowed to be present at the trial, that is not actually the case. Komilov stated that he was present for the full trial, but neither he nor Saidov's family was present when Saidov's sentence was issued. Komilov said this is common practice - a holdover from Soviet days.

Other Case Updates

¶5. (C) Sanjar Umarov (See Ref B): Under cover of diplomatic note, Post delivered a letter from Ambassador Norland to President Karimov last week, enclosing a letter from Sanjar Umarov's family asking for his release on humanitarian grounds. To everyone's surprise, President Karimov raised the case during the Under Secretary Burns visit, hinting that amnesty might be an option.

¶6. (C) Salidjon Abdurahmanov (See Ref C): A law firm in Washington has been doing some pro bono work on the case of Abdurahmanov, a journalist imprisoned in Karakalpakstan last year. They are considering taking his case to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions. We have been in touch with Abdurakhmanov's brother (who also served as his lawyer), and he hopes the case will go forward. He stated that while Abdurahmanov has no specific health concerns, he is forced to do manual labor in prison under difficult conditions.

¶7. (C) Yusuf Juma (aka Jumaev) (See Ref D): After reports from poet Yusuf Juma's wife that his condition in prison was deteriorating, poloff on July 24 met with his daughter, Feruza Yusufjon. She is the only member of his immediate family still residing in Uzbekistan, and she is typically the person that visits him in prison. She is very concerned over his condition, and reported that he is kept in a very hot cell located directly above the bread ovens. She also stated that prison guards take hot irons from boiling water and place them on Juma's shoulders. She stated that her father complained about his heart and high blood pressure, as well. During her last visit, Yusufjon was only allowed to speak with her father through glass and over the phone, so she did not have a good sense of his physical condition, but she has a three-day visit scheduled in August, and she will get in touch with us following that visit.

New Cases

¶8. (SBU) The crackdown against members of the Nur religious group seems to be ongoing. In Samarkand, a local court on July 6

sentenced eleven young men (between age 19 and 31) belonging to Nur to between seven and eleven years in prison on charges of preparation and dissemination of materials threatening public security and order, in addition to extremism, separatism, and organizing a fundamental religious organization. All of the men graduated from Turkish high schools with excellent grades. (As post has reported, most of these once well-respected Turkish high schools have been shut down.) Two Embassy contacts told Radio Liberty that they are concerned these arrests are part of a trend of authorities arresting young people with intellectual potential in order to keep them at bay. One contact compared this trend to the repression of intellectuals during the Stalin regime. RFE/RL reported that since last August, nearly 100 people have been arrested on charges related to their participation in the Nur religious group.

¶9. (SBU) The Kashkadarya regional criminal court on August 3 began proceedings against eleven young men (between the ages of 22 and 35) on charges related to their affiliation with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Islamic Jihad, and Al-Qaeda. Human rights activist Surat Ikromov informed poloff that human rights defenders and monitors have been banned from the courtroom, and only three attorneys have been allowed to participate, leaving eight defendants unrepresented by council. The defendants claim to have suffered torture while in pretrial detention facilities.

¶10. (SBU) On July 28, Oyazimkhon Hidirova (aka Khidirova), a human rights activist, was arrested and detained in Jizzakh. Hidirova was a farmer whose land was seized and transferred to a larger landowner under a new plan announced last year. She continued to work her land for the new landlord, but she also spoke out about issue, becoming the regional chairperson for the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU). Hidirova's HRSU colleague, Ziyodullo Razzakov, told an Embassy Public Affairs contact that Hidirova and her landlord got in an argument about her failing to give the required amount of harvest to the landlord, and Hidirova unwittingly grabbed the clothes of the landlord and scratched him. The incident occurred about a month before the arrest, but on July 29, authorities arrested Hidirova and searched her home. Hidirova's colleague and the press speculate that authorities are using the argument with the landlord as pretense to silence her over land reform issues.

¶11. (C) Tashkent human rights activist Farhodhon Mukhtarov was arrested in the middle of July on charges related to a civil case brought against him three years ago, as well as financial misdealing related to his recent attempt to sell his apartment. Mukhtarov's colleague in the Human Rights Alliance, Oleg Sarapulov, and his wife, Surayo Mukhtoreva, told poloff the charges are baseless, and another instance of intimidation against an activist. One immediate problem they face is that they have been unable to find a reliable defense attorney. Sarapulov reported that they had just hired a third attorney, as the first two had quit the case after being intimidated by officials. Following new testing and registration requirements for defense attorneys instituted in June, many of the attorneys that used to take human rights cases have lost their licenses. Sarapulov said there is a fee every time they have to register a new attorney, so they are hoping this third attorney is able to handle the pressure.

Civil Society

¶12. (SBU) The GOU denied accreditation to the proposed Director for the Institute for New Democracies (IND), David Blood. IND is one of only two U.S.-funded international NGOs working in Uzbekistan, and this is the second proposed director to have been denied accreditation since the departure of its previous Director Mjusa Sever. USAID Country Director Jim Bonner and Charge, in

separate meetings with the MFA last week, both requested clarification on whether the denials were based on the individuals proposed or on difficulties with IND, and guidance on how to move forward from here.

¶13. (SBU) UNDP Deputy Resident Representative Kyoko Postill expressed her frustrations to poloff about difficulties concerning recent UNDP publications. UNDP recently published something on women in Uzbekistan, working closely with the Women's Committee of the GOU. Postill described the publication as politically neutral, addressing challenges women face and giving short anecdotes about women in various roles. Something must have touched a nerve, because prosecutors have called in the local writers and journalists who wrote the materials (contracted out by UNDP), and have questioned them about who in the GOU gave approval for the publication and whether they were paid to write something specific. Postill is concerned that this intimidation will hinder UNDP's efforts to create further publications.

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